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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004908

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SUBJECT: PM DISCUSSES PRISON INSPECTIONS, VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA, BORDER CLOSURES, INCIDENT AT UMM QASR

REF: BAGHDAD 4836

Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION DAVID SATTERFIELD FOR REASONS 1. 4 (a), (b), AND (d).

¶1. (C//REL GBR AUS) SUMMARY: On the evening of December 3, Prime Minister Ibrahim Ja'afari hosted a meeting at his residence attended by Charge, MNF-I Commanding General and Deputy Commanding General, UK Ambassador Patey, and DepPolMilCouns. Present with the PM were Chief of Staff Dr. Abdul Aziz al-Tamimi and Senior Advisor Adnan Ali. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss Ja'afari's plan to reorganize the Ministry of Defense (reftel). Other discussion topics included the PM's visit to Saudi Arabia, border closures, and the incident at Umm Qasr. END SUMMARY.

DETENTION FACILITY INSPECTIONS

¶2. (C//REL GBR AUS) Charge informed Ja'afari that the committee tasked with inspecting Iraqi detention facilities nationwide following the Bunker incident, headed by Major General Talib al-Kanini, will make its first unannounced inspections on December 8. These inspections would be led and carried out by Iraqi investigators, the PM said, but with the support of Embassy and MNF-I assets. It is critical, Charge noted, for Ja'afari to continue to support publicly this committee and the committee investigating the Bunker incident. Ja'afari replied that the investigations have his full support.

BORDER CLOSURES FOR ARABS

¶3. (C//REL GBR AUS) Charge called Ja'afari's attention to a decree issued several days ago by the Minister of Interior ordering Iraq's borders closed to non-Iraqi Arabs until the election on December 15 is completed. Charge noted that this unexpected order is causing many complications, as it was prohibiting the entry into Iraq of a large number of Arab journalists, attorneys for the Saddam trial, election observers, NGO and international organization employees, and others whose presence in Iraq is in the interests of the GOI and the USG. The order is too broad and must be modified, Charge stated. UK Ambassador Patey noted that the ban does not apply to Iranian pilgrims and appeared to be discriminatory and inflammatory, particularly to Sunnis. Patey suggested that the border closure measures be the same as they were for the referendum (i.e., effective only immediately before and after the election, with exceptions made at the airports). Ja'afari agreed to have the measures reexamined and modified. (NOTE: Post continues to work the issue of formal ratification of the changes to the travel ban. We understand that some lifting may have begun December ¶18. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C//REL GBR AUS) GEN Casey informed Ja'afari that on November 30 a ceremony had been held in Husayba on the Syrian border to commemorate the restoration of Iraqi control over its borders. While acknowledging that it is impossible to seal any border, GEN Casey pointed out that the borders now are manned by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) based in a chain of border forts and backed up by Iraqi Army (IA) forces.

PASSAGE OF BUDGET

¶5. (C//REL GBR AUS) Charge next brought up the TNA's inability to achieve the quorum needed to pass the 2006 budget law. It is imperative that the budget law be passed before the TNA adjourns, Charge exhorted, since failure to do so would jeopardize the provisional IMF Standby Arrangement (SBA) and seriously threaten the economy of Iraq. Charge informed Ja'afari that Embassy is working hard to convince already-departed TNA members (particularly the Kurds) to return for a budget vote, and strongly urged him to do whatever possible to convince others to return as well. Ja'afari responded that he appreciated the urgency of the matter and was working hard to obtain successful passage of the budget. (NOTE: The TNA subsequently passed the budget law

on December 6. END NOTE.)

POST-BATTLE RECONSTRUCTION FUNDS

16. (C//REL GBR AUS) Charge and the UK Ambassador urged Ja'afari to make good on the GOI's promise to provide post-battle reconstruction funds for Fallujah, Tal Afar, and the Euphrates River Valley. The GOI's continued failure to fund reconstruction as promised, they added, is becoming an embarrassment for the government and also risks the long-term success of the military operations designed to clear those areas of terrorists and insurgents. Adnan Ali responded that the funds are available but that the Ministry of Finance still is awaiting approved plans from the relevant ministries on how to spend them. Charge stressed the need to get on with it and to begin helping Iraqis rebuild their lives and futures.

VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA

17. (C//REL GBR AUS) Ja'afari briefly described his recent visit to Saudi Arabia. He characterized the visit as a success, although the Saudis have not yet consented to granting the number of Hajj visas desired by Iraq. Iraq can afford and has requested 35,000 visas, Ja'afari said, but the Saudis so far have allocated only enough for 25,000 Iraqi pilgrims. The PM noted that the Saudi King promised to consider his request for more visas. Charge responded that Post also is pushing the Saudis on behalf of Iraq and that the Secretary has sent a message to the King on this subject.

DIFFICULTIES AT UMM QASR NORTH PORT

18. (C//REL GBR AUS) The UK Ambassador raised a recent incident at the port of Umm Qasr in Basra that involved Ministry of Transportation (MOT) security forces and British private security firm employees. On December 2, Ambassador Patey explained, Coalition Forces responded to a standoff between ISF and the Armour Group (MNSTC-I contractor for pick-up and delivery of ISF equipment). Armour's convoys reportedly were denied access to the port and also told to vacate their facility at the port. ISF conveyed to Coalition Forces that Armour instigated the incident by attacking them. The situation was eventually diffused for the night, Patey added; however, on December 3, the ISF told Armour to leave the facilities or else face attack. Armour took the threat seriously and reported to the British Shaibor Logistics Base that they were denied access. Armour now is staying at the KBR facilities and avoiding the port until they are guaranteed security and no further threats from ISF. It is believed, Patey said, that the Ministry of Transportation (MOT) is behind these threats and that they are a continuation of conflicts that have occurred at the Basra and Baghdad airports.

19. (C//REL GBR AUS) Ambassador Patey and Charge stressed to Ja'afari that disputes about control of port security must be resolved, adding that ministries should not have competing security forces. Ja'afari replied that this had happened because of a misunderstanding about a decision to grant MOI control over all port facilities - which the MOT is not happy about. Ja'afari promised that a committee would look into the matter and try to resolve it in the coming days. He agreed that multiple agencies cannot be in charge of security for the ports. In the meantime, MNF-I forces will continue to monitor the situation at Umm Qasr.

KHALILZAD